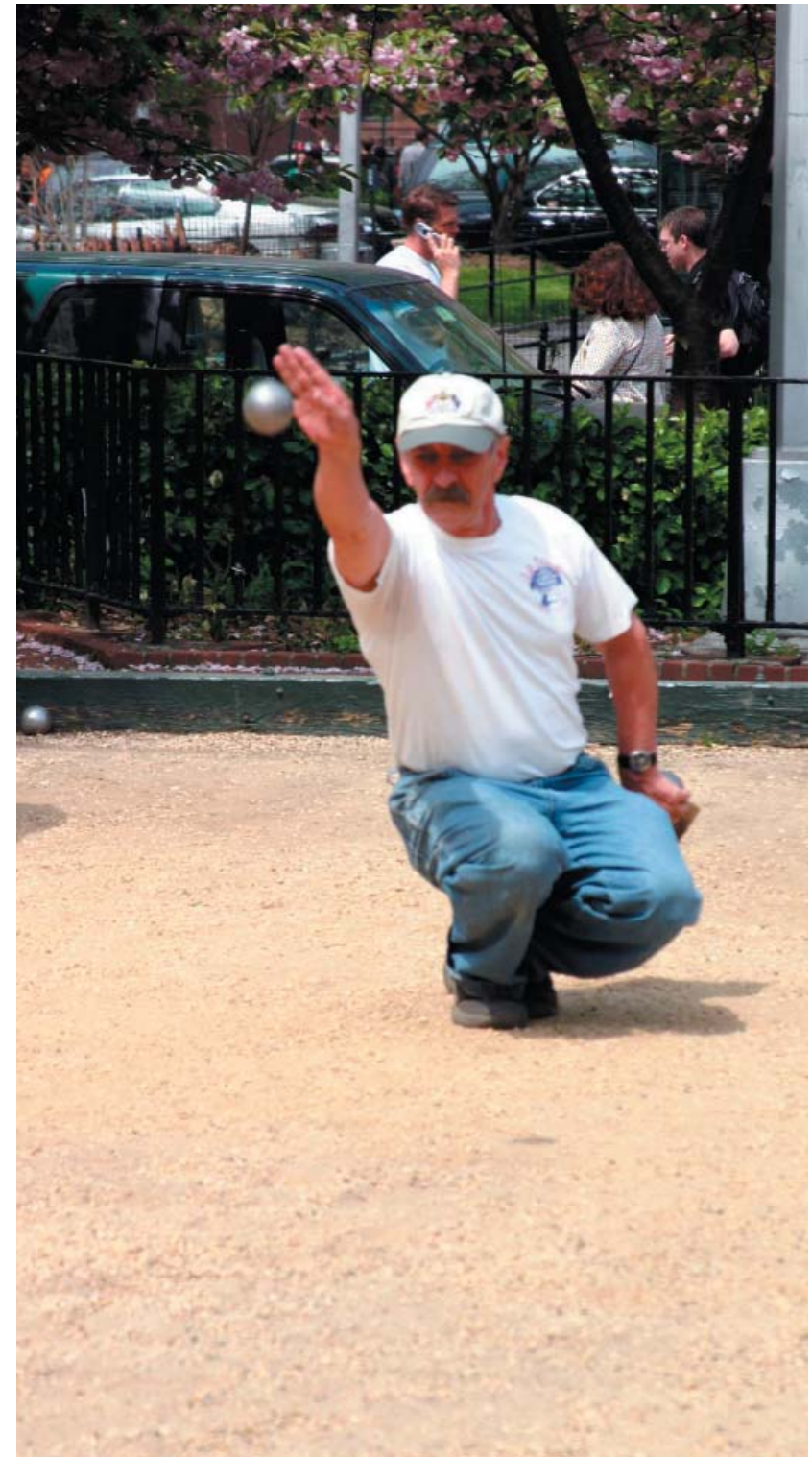


# What makes a great public place?

- **Image and Identity.** Historically, promenades and town squares were the focal point of communities, and they traditionally gave identity to an entire city. Sometimes a fountain was used to give the central character of a square: think of the Trevi Fountain in Rome or the Swann fountain in Philadelphia's Logan Circle. And many of the grand squares had great civic buildings such as religious institutions, libraries, etc. Today, creating a promenade or square that becomes the most significant place in a city and that gives identity to the city is a huge challenge, but meeting this challenge is absolutely necessary if great public places are to return.
- **Accessibility.** To be successful, a place needs to be easy to get to. The best places in the world are always easily accessible by foot. The streets around them are narrow; the crosswalks are well marked; the lights are timed for pedestrians, not vehicles; the traffic moves slowly; and transit is nearby. On the other hand, a place surrounded by lanes of fast-moving traffic cuts the area off from pedestrians and deprives it of its essential element: people.



- **Amenities.** The amenities that are located in a public place make it comfortable for people to use. A bench or waste receptacle in just the right location can make a big difference in how people choose to use a place, lighting that helps to give a place an identity but that also highlights specific activities, entrances, or pathways is key. Amenities can be temporary or permanent, but the essence of a good amenity is that it helps create the setting for social interaction. Public art can be a great magnet for children of all ages to come together.
- **Flexible design.** The use of a promenade changes during the course of the day, week, and year and to respond to this potential use, flexibility needs to be built in.







- **Seasonal Strategy.** A successful place today can no longer have just one design or management strategy. The best places like Rockefeller Center in New York, Bryant Park next to the public library in New York, or Campus Martius, a new square in Detroit, change with the seasons. Elements such as skating rinks, outdoor cafes, markets, horticulture displays, art and sculpture are used as a flexible element during different seasons.
- **Attractions and Destinations.** Any great public place has a variety of smaller “places” within it that helps to establish a human scale. These attractions can be anything - outdoor cafes, fountains, sculpture, or an event. Attractions or destinations don’t need to be big to make the square a true destination. In fact, some of the best urban places have numerous small attractions that, when put together, draw people all through the day.

We often use “The Power of Ten” concept to set a goal for a destination. Creating ten places with ten things to do in each place sets a full program from which to develop infrastructure, management and design parameters that create the setting for successful public spaces.



- **Active Edges.** Frederick Law Olmsted's vision of the "inner park" and the "outer park" (or public space or promenade) is just as relevant today as it was 100 years ago. The streets and sidewalks around a public place greatly affect its accessibility and use, as do the buildings that surround it. Imagine a square fronted on each side by 15-foot blank walls. Then imagine it next to a public library: the library doors open right onto the square; people sit outside and read on the steps; maybe the children's reading room has an outdoor space on the square, or even a bookstore and cafe. An active, welcoming outer "square" is essential to the well-being of the inner "square".
- **Reach out like an Octopus.** As important as the edges of a public place is the way that the streets and sidewalks and the ground floor uses along them lead into the area. The influence of a good gathering place (such as Union Square in New York) starts at least a block away where the vehicle traffic begins to slow down, the pedestrian use increases and becomes easier, elements in the area are visible from a distance, and the ground floor uses in buildings encourage pedestrians to move toward the area.





- **Management: Central to the Solution.** Fluid, changing places are the ones that people return to time and time again. The only way to achieve this is by a management organization set up to understand and manage the pulse of a public place. For example, a good manager understands existing and potential users and gears events to both types of people. They are so familiar with the use patterns that waste receptacles get emptied at just the right time. Good managers create a feeling of comfort and safety in a square, fixing and maintaining it so that people have visible signs that someone is in charge.
- **Diverse Funding Sources.** A well managed public place is generally beyond the scope of the average city department, which is why partnerships have been established to operate most of the best public places in the United States. These partnerships seek to supplement what the city can provide with funding from diverse sources which can include rent from cafes or other small commercial uses or markets on the site, film shoots, benefits, taxes on adjacent properties, etc.

